

**Go Ahead, Criticize a Volunteer Coach:
But It Will Only Make You Bitterer and Littler.**

by John Hannon

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I have volunteered somewhere between 100 and 500 hours a year as a volunteer baseball and hockey coach.

I started thirty some years ago when I was 16. Steve Lorenz and I had the 7 year old “Yankees” house league baseball team in Clinton, NY (population 2,000). I’ll never forget the way a scrawny, small farmer’s kid named Mike Granger could whiff everybody his age.

I plan to coach until I die. Indeed, I hope I am on an ice rink or ball field when the good Lord calls me home. I can’t think of a better way to go out. Well, there may be one better way, but this is a family publication.

All kidding aside, I have marveled at the mean spirited disrespect volunteer youth coaches get, especially over the last ten years. It is a disgrace. And, it’s gotten worse.

Perhaps we can do our part to start reversing the trend.

Sure, there are harmful coaches – those who mentally or physically abuse children.

Sure, there are substandard coaches – those who don’t know, or do, as much as they should.

Sure, there are good coaches who occasionally play the wrong players, overplay their own kid, or lose their temper.

But, the vast majority of volunteer coaches are good, reasonable people, trying to do the right thing.

It boggles my mind how many parents, from all walks of life, say and do things toward volunteer coaches that they would be ashamed of in other settings – especially if they looked at things in a different light.

Think of it this way – as I often have.

Consider a doctor or a lawyer or a nurse or a banker taking 500 hours a year out of their life to start a “career development program” for mites, squirts, pee-wees, and bantams. As parents, we simply cover the costs of this program (room rental and materials). The doctor volunteers the equivalent of ¼ of a work year and in doing so gives up the opportunity to make 25% more annual salary for his family (and he pays the same \$1,500 fee as us, because his kid is in the program too). The doctor does it for 10 years in a row.

We drop our kids off at some building and then watch classes and labs through the safety glass (on any given day it’s a social thing for us or we don’t have anything better to do or we are avoiding cleaning the gutters!).

Then all heck breaks loose.

- Next thing you know, a kid drops a beaker – and we criticize the doctor for the mistake the kid made.
- My kid gets talked to less than the others as the doc walks around the room – and I criticize the doctor for not giving him “equal” airtime.
- We hear from our friend at work that her kid has already dissected a frog while our kids are still working on the worm – so we criticize the doctor because our kids are falling behind.

- Our kid doesn't do his assigned reading, much less any extra work – and we criticize the doctor for not motivating the kids.
- We see the doctor forcefully correct our kid when he puts the safety of the other kids in the class in jeopardy – and we criticize the doctor for being too demanding.
- We see the doctor leave the room briefly to dispense directions regarding a patient and, while he's gone, the kids fool around – and we criticize the doctor for the kids' lack of judgment and discipline.
- We hear about a “bad doctor” on the other side of town – so we parrot what everyone else is saying without ever talking to him, his class of kids, or their parents.

When I look at youth coaching in this light it is certainly an eye opener. It is a reminder to me to only ever consider questioning a coach if I see them abusing a kid or putting a kid in harm's way. It is a reminder that every observation and grievance I have doesn't need to be broadcast to all my friends, much less the entire hockey world – which has a huge appetite for negativity.

We are fortunate, indeed blessed, to have adults volunteering to teach our children sports and sportsmanship.

Think back to the example I cited above. It does not exist. At least not that I know of.

There are no doctors, lawyer, bankers, professors, or entrepreneurs volunteering that much time to help this many young people. If there are, all of us would love to hear about them. I know I'd sign my kid up tomorrow.

Please keep in mind that your coach, and any coach you are criticizing, sweats, falls, aches, worries, plans, and tries; every day. Why? They do it to help kids, yours and mine.

As we start the New Year, please think twice the next time you feel like venting about or spewing venom at a volunteer coach. All the venom circulating in our area brings about unnecessary, and unjustified, hurt.

Remember, your child's coach is a husband, and a dad.